

Ent'd in Supp.

T H E
S P E E C H
O F T H E

Right Hon. JOHN WILKES, Esq.

LORD MAYOR OF THE CITY OF LONDON,

I N T H E

H O U S E o f C O M M O N S,

On WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY, 8, 1775.

R E L A T I V E T O A

M O T I O N made by LORD NORTH,

O N T H E

American Taxation Bills.

M R. S P E A K E R,

THE Buſineſs now before the Houſe, reſpecting America, is of as great Importance as was ever debated in Parliament. It comprehends almoſt every Queſtion relative to the common Rights of Mankind, almoſt every Queſtion of Policy and Legislation. I do not mean to enter into ſo vaſt, ſo well trodden a Field. I will confine myſelf to the Buſineſs before us. The Addreſs now reported from the Committee of the whole Houſe, appears to me unfounded, raſh, and fanguinary, and moſt unjuſtly to draw the Sword againſt America; but before Adminiſtration are ſuffered to plunge this Nation into the Horrors of a Civil War; before they are permitted to force Engliſhmen to ſheathe their Swords in the Bowels of their Fellow Subjects, I hope this Houſe will ſeriouſly weigh the original Ground and Cauſe of this unhappy Diſpute, and in Time reflect whether Juſtice is on our Side. The aſſumed Right of Taxation, without the Conſent of the Subject, is plainly the primary Cauſe of the preſent

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Quarrel. Have we, Sir, any Right to Tax the Americans? That is the Question. The fundamental Laws of human Nature, and the Principles of the English Constitution, are equally repugnant to the Claim. The very Idea of Property excludes the Right of another's taking any Thing from me without my Consent, otherwise I cannot call it my own. What Property have I in what another Person can seize at his Pleasure? If we can tax the Americans without their Consent, they have no Property, nothing which they can call their own; we might take their ALL. The Words, "LIBERTY AND PROPERTY," so dear to an Englishman, so pleasing in our Ears, would become Mockery and Insult to an American. The Laws of Society are professedly calculated to secure the property of each Individual, of every Subject of the State. The great Principles of the Constitution under which we live, likewise clearly determine this Point. All Subsidies to the Crown are Grants from the Commons, free Gifts from the People. Their full Consent is always expressed in the Grant. Much has been said of the Palatinate of Chester, and the Principality of Wales, and the Period of their Taxation; but, Sir, there is a more remarkable Case in Point, which alone would determine the Question. If Gentlemen will search the Records in the Tower, they will find that the Town of Calais, in France, when it belonged to the Imperial Crown of these Realms, was not taxed till it sent Representatives to Parliament. Two Burgeesses from Calais actually sat and voted in this House. Then, and not till then, was Calais taxed. The Writ out of Chancery, and the Return to it, in the Reign of Edward VI. with the Names of the Burgeesses, are still extant. I faithfully gave them to the Public from attested Copies.

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But, Sir, it will be said, is America then to enjoy⁸¹⁸ the Protection of Great Britain, and to contribute nothing towards the Support of that very State, which has so long given it Protection and Security, which has nursed it up to its present Greatness? The Americans themselves have given the fullest Answer to this Objection in a Manner not to be controverted, by their Conduct through a long Series of Years, and by the most explicit Declarations. Equally in Words and Actions, of the most unequivocal Nature, they have demonstrated their Love, their Ardour, their strong filial Piety towards the Mother Country. They have always appeared ready not only to contribute towards the Expences of their own Government, but likewise to the Wants and the Necessities of this State, altho' perhaps they may not be over-fond of all the proud, expensive Trappings of Royalty. In the two last Wars they far exceeded the cold Line of Prudence. With the most liberal Hearts they gave you almost their All, and they fought gallantly by your Side with equal Valour against our and their Enemy, against the common Enemy of Mankind, the ambitious and faithless French, whom we now fear and flatter. Our Journals, Sir, will bear Witness to the grateful Sense we had of the important Services of the Americans, and the great Sums we voted to be repaid them for what they expended in the spirited Expeditions, which they carried through with equal Courage and Conduct, sometimes without the least Knowledge or Participation on our Part, will demonstrate the warm Affection of their Hearts to this Country. But, Sir, the whole was the Gift of Freemen, of

free as ourselves. What is their Language now, when you are planning their Destruction, when you are declaring them Rebels? In the late Petition of the General Congress to the King, they declare "they are ready and willing, as they ever have been, when constitutionally required, to demonstrate their Loyalty to his Majesty, *by exerting their most strenuous Efforts in granting Supplies and raising Forces.*" This is the unanimous Resolution of a Congress composed of Deputies from the several Colonies of New Hampshire, Massachusetts Bay, Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Connecticut, New-York, New-Jersey, Pennsylvania, the Counties of New-Castle, Kent, and Suffex on Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and the two Carolinas. I have heard, Sir, of a Plan of Accommodation, which I believe would reconcile all Differences. But alas! Sir, it does not come from any Servant of the Crown; it comes from the Noble Lord, to whom this Country has the most essential Obligations, and is so much indebted for its late Splendour and Glory. It is to assemble another Congress in the Spring, the Parliament of Great Britain, and the Deputies of the several Colonies to meet together, and to be jointly empowered to regulate the various Quotas to be paid by each Province to the general Treasury of the whole Empire. I would, in Addition to that Plan, propose, that a Regulation similar to what actually takes Place with respect to Scotland be adopted as to America. The Proportion of each Colony might be settled according to the Land Tax in England, at one, two, or more Shillings in the Pound. I am not deep Politician enough to know what the Proportions should be of each Province, and they will vary greatly in half a Century, but I speak of their Quota being always to be regulated according to the Land Tax of this Country. The very flourishing Colonies of the Massachusetts Bay, Virginia and South Carolina for Instance, should contribute more, the smaller and poorer Colonies of New Hampshire and New Jersey less; but, Sir, I insist not a single Shilling can be taken without their Consent; and, after this Day's Debate, should the Address be carried, I greatly fear every Idea of a Reconciliation will be utterly impracticable.

The Americans, Sir, have of late, both within Doors and without, been treated with the greatest Injustice, and even a wanton Degree of Cruelty. An honourable Gentleman has just told us, that they complain of the *Navigation Act*, and insist on its Repeal. We have authentic Evidence to the contrary. In the Resolutions of the Congress they repeatedly desire to be put only on the Footing they were *at the Close of the late War*, "as to the System of Statutes and Regulations;" nor among the various Acts, of which they desire the Repeal, do they once mention either the *Navigation*, or the *Declaratory Act*. It is said likewise, they wish to throw off the Supremacy of this Country. Many express Resolutions, both of the General Congress, and the Provincial Congresses, are the fullest Evidence of the Sense which the Americans entertain of their Obedience and Duty to this Country. They are too numerous to be quoted. Their full Claim, as stated by themselves, is so well worded, I beg to read it to the House from their Petition to the King. *We ask but for Peace, Liberty, and Safety.* Surely, Sir, no Request was ever more reasonable, no Claim better founded. *We wish not a Diminution of the Prerogative, nor do we solicit a Grant of*

any new Right in our Favour. Your Royal Authority over us and our Connection with Great Britain, we shall always carefully and zealously endeavour to support and maintain, while Administration are endeavouring to tear asunder those Ties, which has so long and happily bound us together.

The Address, Sir, mentions the particular Province of Massachusetts Bay as in a State of actual Rebellion, and the other Provinces are considered as aiding and abetting them. Much has been said by some learned Gentlemen to involve them in all the Consequences of a declared Rebellion, and to encourage our Officers and Troops to act against them as against Rebels. Whether their present State is that of Rebellion, or of a fit and proper Resistance to unlawful Acts of Power, to our Attempts to rob them of their Property and Liberties, as they imagine, I do not determine. This I know, a successful Resistance is a *Revolution*, not a *Rebellion*. Who can tell, Sir, whether in Consequence of this very Day's violent and mad Address to his Majesty, the Scabbard may not be thrown away by them as well as by us, and should Success attend them, whether, in a few Years, the Americans may not celebrate the glorious Æra of the Revolution of 1775, as we do that of 1688. Success crowned the generous Efforts of our Forefathers for Freedom, else they had died on the Scaffold as Traitors and Rebels, and the Period of our History, which does us the most Honour, would have been deemed a *Rebellion* against lawful Authority, not a Resistance authorized by all the Laws of God and Man, not the Expulsion of a Tyrant.

The Policy, Sir, of this Measure I can no more comprehend than I can acknowledge the Justice of it. Is your Force adequate to the Attempt? I am satisfied it is not. What are your Armies, and how are they to be recruited? Do you recollect that the single Province of the Massachusetts Bay has at this Moment above 30,000 Men, well trained and disciplined, and can bring near 90,000 into the Field. They will do it, when they are fighting for their Liberties. You will not be able to conquer and keep even that single Province. The noble Lord proposes only 10,000 of our Troops to be there, including the four Regiments now going from Ireland, and he acknowledges very truly, that the Army cannot enforce the late Acts of Parliament. Why then is it sent? Boston indeed you may lay in Ashes, or it may be made a strong Garrison, but the Province will be lost to you. Boston will be like Gibraltar. You will hold in the Province of Massachusetts Bay, as you do in Spain, a single Town, the whole Country in the Power and Possession of the Enemy. Your Fleets and Armies may keep a few Towns on the Coast, for some Time at least, Boston, New York, St. Augustine. The vast Continent of America will be lost to you. A few Fortresses on the Coast and some Sea Ports only you will keep, all the back Settlements will be independent of you, and will thrive in the rapid Progression of your Violences and unjust Exactions on the Towns. The ancient Story of the Carthaginian Hide will be verified as to you. Where you tread, it will be kept down, but it will rise the more in all the other Parts. Where your Fleets and Armies are stationed, the Possession will be your's, but all the rest will be lost. I

fear from this Day in the great Scale of Empire you will decline, and the Americans will rise to Independence; to Power, to all the Greatness of the most renowned States, for they build on the solid Basis of Public Liberty.

Sir, this Address is founded in Injustice and Cruelty. It is equally contrary to the sound Maxims of true Policy, and to the unerring Rule of natural Right. The Americans will defend their Property and their Liberties with the Spirit of Freemen, with the Spirit I hope we should. They will sooner declare themselves independent, and risk every Consequence of such a Contest, than submit to the Yoke, which Administration is preparing for them. An Address of so sanguinary a Nature cannot fail of driving them to Despair. They will see that you are preparing not only to draw the Sword, but to burn the Scabbard. You are declaring them Rebels. Every Idea of a Reconciliation will vanish. They will pursue the most vigorous Measures in their own Defence. The whole Continent will be dismembered from Great Britain, and *the wide Arch of the raised Empire fall*. But I hope the just Vengeance of the People will overtake the Authors of these pernicious Counsels, and the Loss of the first Province to the Empire be speedily followed by the Loss of the Heads of those Ministers, who advised these wicked and fatal Measures.

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